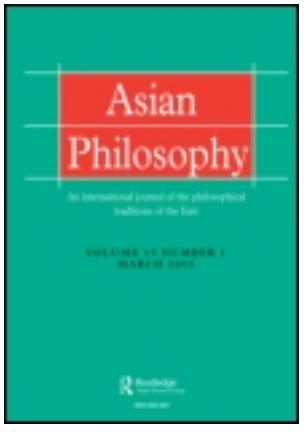


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# A Dialectical Reading of the *Bhagavadgita*

Kenneth Dorter



*The Gita at first appears to be a series of explanations of various kinds of* yoga *strung together in no apparent order, and several of its claims and arguments seem to contradict one another. I argue that the apparent contradictions disappear if we see the arguments as related to one another dialectically rather than analytically. From an analytic perspective contradictions are either merely verbal and can be disambiguated by a conceptual distinction, or else they render the statement meaningless. A dialectical resolution, in the sense I am using the term, requires a change of perspective rather than a simple terminological clarification. A dialectical reading can also show that the appearance of randomness in the order of presentation follows from an organizing principle that is hierarchical rather than linear.*

## 1. Introduction

The Gita appears at first to be a series of explanations of various kinds of *yoga*, strung together in no obvious order. Although the traditional thematic identifications in the colophons at the end of each chapter were not part of the original text, they give a good sense of the thematic arrangement of the chapters and the apparent absence of any linear ordering principle.[1] If anything, the chapters are even less orderly than the colophons suggest. Chapter 6 for example, described by its colophon as The *Yoga* of Meditation (*dhyanayogo*), begins with an explanation of *karma yoga*, followed by an explanation of *bhakti yoga*, returns to *karma yoga*, turns next to renunciation, then to *jñanavijñana yoga*, before arriving at *dhyana yoga* in the 10th stanza. This appearance of repetition and cyclical arrangement is not because the Gita is poorly organized but because its principle of organization is recursive rather than linear. However, beyond repetition and discursiveness the book sometimes gives a more worrying impression of inconsistency. A number of its claims and arguments seem directly contradicted by one another.[2] What I hope to show is that these apparent contradictions among the arguments disappear if we see the arguments as related to one another dialectically rather than analytically. The dialectic imbedded in this recursive structure is recursive

Correspondence to: Kenneth Dorter, Department of Philosophy, University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, N1G 2W1, Canada. Email: kdorter@uoguelph.ca

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as well, as hierarchal strata within the conversation rather than a linear progression. Its individual moments are related in terms of conceptual rather than narrative priority.

What I mean by 'dialectical' can be seen by contrast with 'analytic'. From an analytic perspective contradictions are either merely verbal or else they render the statement altogether meaningless. If verbal they can be immediately disambiguated by making an appropriate distinction. 'Arjuna is fighting and not fighting', would be meaningless if 'fighting' is used in precisely the same respect both times, but if it is understood that he is 'fighting' insofar as he is struggling to arrive at the right decision, and 'not fighting' because he has not entered the physical battlefield, the appearance of contradiction is gone; it was only a rhetorical trope. But it is more than a trope when Krishna says that Brahman is 'neither existent [*sat*] nor non-existent [*asat*]' (13.12). The entities that we perceive with our senses, which are our primary referents for the meaning of words, either exist or do not, either are present in space and time or are not. As long as we include becoming as a species of being, there is no middle ground between is and is not. By that standard Krishna's statement is analytically false, self-contradictory and therefore meaningless; there is no simple adjectival distinction to resolve the tension by speaking of Brahman as existing in one familiar sense but not in another. The statement becomes meaningful only if we come to recognize, perhaps as a result of the paradox itself, a reality to which concepts derived from the world of sensory experience are not adequate, including the concepts of existence and nonexistence. If we understand existence in terms of presence in space and time, and nonexistence as absence from space and time, the source of space and time itself can neither be said to exist or not exist.[3]

Unlike an analytic resolution, which requires a simple terminological clarification, a dialectical resolution requires a change of perspective. That is what happens in the *Bhagavadgita*. The following discussion is divided into three main sections: (1) the arguments for Arjuna's entry into the war; (2) the status of the principal varieties of *yoga*; and (3) the concept of nonviolence.

## 2. The Arguments

The *Bhagavadgita* is dialectical not only in the obvious sense of being a dialog between two speakers who begin with opposing points of view and progressively come into agreement, but also in the way its arguments are related to one another. It has been widely noted that the arguments Krishna employs to persuade Arjuna to enter into battle sometimes conflict with one another, as for example, when he appeals to Arjuna's pride, warning that people will lose respect for him if he does not fight (2.34–36), but two stanzas later tells Arjuna not to be concerned about such things at all but rather to fight only out of a sense of duty. Such reversals may give the impression that Krishna is being manipulative, telling Arjuna anything that may produce the desired result; but that would go against the central teaching that we should be concerned only with the action and not with its fruits, the means rather

than the ends. That sentiment is expressed only a few verses later: 'To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be they motive' (2.47).[4] So how can Krishna urge upon Arjuna the rewards of being honored by others?

### *2.1. Personal Feeling*

The initial antitheses begin sequentially—the order of narration mirrors the order of dialectical priority—starting when Arjuna recoils from the battle not for reasons of pacifism but because of personal attachments and their attendant pleasures and pains. He sees in the enemy lines

> my own people arrayed and eager for fight . . . Those for whose sake we desire kingdom, enjoyments and pleasures—they stand here in battle, renouncing their lives and riches: teachers, fathers, sons, and also grandfathers; uncles and fathers-in-law, grandsons and brothers-in-law, and other kinsmen. These I would not consent to kill, though killed myself . . . What pleasure can be ours, O Krishna, after we have slain the sons of Dhritarashtra? (1.28–36)

Arjuna himself provides the other side of the dilemma in the next lines when he characterizes these same people as criminals (*atatayina*)[5] overpowered by greed (*lobhopahata*) who see nothing wrong in the destruction of the family and treachery to friends (1.36–38). How should greedy, destructive, treacherous, criminals go unpunished and even unopposed?

The reply to this was already present in the previous passage immediately after the words just quoted: 'Only sin will accrue to us if we kill these criminals' (1.36); and continues in what follows:

> In the ruin of a family its ancient laws [*dharmah*] are destroyed: and when the laws [*dharme*] perish the whole family yields to lawlessness [*adharmo*] . . . And to hell does this confusion bring the family itself as well as those who have destroyed it . . . [T]he men of the families whose laws are destroyed needs must live in hell. (1.40–44)

The initial antithesis is at the level of passion—familial affection on one hand, revulsion at their behavior on the other—and is followed by a resolution at the level of *dharma:* to violate the duty (*dharma*) to his family would be to bring upon himself and everyone he cares about a suffering far greater than they would incur at the hands of Duryodhana and his followers. 'Far better would it be for me if the sons of Dhritarashtra, with weapons in hand, should slay me in the battle, while I remain unresisting and unarmed' (1.46). But it is not a happy resolution, with 'his spirit overwhelmed by sorrow' (1.47).

### *2.2. Dharma*

This unhappy resolution at the level of *dharma*, of the antithesis between Arjuna's family feeling and his disapproval of their behavior, will soon be given its own antithesis by Krishna. After listening to two preliminary arguments[6] Arjuna appeals

to Krishna for clarification and instruction, 'with my mind bewildered about my duty [*dharmasammudhacetah*]' (2.7). Krishna responds at length, saying at one point:

> Further, having regard for thine own duty [*dharmam*], thou shouldst not falter, there exists no greater good for a Kshatriya than a war enjoined by duty [*dharmyad*][7]... But if thou doest not this lawful [*dharmyam*] battle, then thou wilt fail thy duty [*dharmam*] and glory and incur sin. (2.31, 33)

Here the antithesis returns, this time at the level of *dharma* rather than that of feeling. The *dharma* of the family requires Arjuna not to fight (1.40–46), but the *dharma* of his caste requires him to fight (2.31, 33). Like the hero of Aeschylus' Oresteia, or Sartre's student who must choose between his patriotic and filial duties, whichever duty Arjuna follows will cause him to violate an antithetical duty. Accordingly Arjuna reproaches Krishna for the ambiguity of his explanation: 'With an apparently confused utterance thou seemest to bewilder my intelligence' (3.2).

If Arjuna resolved the conflict among his personal feelings by an appeal to *dharma*, how can a conflict between two *dharmas* be resolved? A few stanzas later Krishna says, 'When thine intelligence, which is bewildered by the Vedic texts, shall stand unshaken and stable in spirit [*samadhi*], then shalt thou attain to *yoga*' (2.53).[8] Arjuna is indeed bewildered by the Vedic texts some of which emphasize family *dharma* while others emphasize caste *dharma*. The resolution then is to be found in *yoga*. The guide to moral behavior is not a deontological obedience to formulaic rules, but a version of virtue ethics. We cannot identify a set of rules that will always result in virtuous behavior regardless of the circumstances, but we can identify what kind of person will always be able to recognize the appropriate way to behave. This way of being can be clarified by contrast with its opposite, the demonic:

> There are two types of beings created in the world—the divine [*daiva*] and the demonic [*asura*]. The divine have been described at length. Hear from me, O Partha, about the demonic... They say that the world is unreal [*asatyam*], without a basis, without a Lord, not brought about in regular sequence [*aparasparasambhutam*[9]], caused by desire, in short. (16.6, 8)

In other words the demonic refers to those who do not believe there is an inherent meaning or purposeful direction in the world, and who believe that the only thing that gives our experience value is pleasure and absence of pain, so that reality is constructed out of perceptions colored by our desires ('caused by desire'). Although the demonic is the purest case, the same thing applies to all of us: 'All beings are born deluded [*sammoham*], O Bharata, overcome by the dualities which arise from wish and hate' (7.27). It is in fact delusion (*mohat*) which makes Arjuna reluctant to fight (18.60). We must overcome this, Krishna says, by casting away both good and evil, and striving for *yoga* instead (2.50).

Verse 37 of Chapter 2 marks the point of transition from delusion to *yoga*. Prior to that Krishna warned Arjuna that if he refrained from battle,

> men will ever recount they ill-fame, and for one who has been honoured ill-fame is worse than death. The great warriors will think that thou hast abstained from battle through fear, and they by whom thou wast highly esteemed will make light of thee.

> Many unseemly words will be uttered by thine enemies, slandering thy strength. Could anything be sadder than that? (2.34–36)

But two verses later Krishna says, 'Treating alike pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat, then get ready for battle' (2.38). The earlier passage appealed to these very things—the pain of being thought a coward and the loss of the respect of others—while this one tells Arjuna to be indifferent to such matters and treat them all alike. The earlier appeals to personal pleasure and pain are here replaced by appeals to a standard that is indifferent to pleasure and pain. The turning point was verse 37: 'Either slain thou shalt go to heaven; or victorious thou shalt enjoy earth; therefore arise, O Son of Kunti, resolve on battle'. Right and wrong are no longer measured by pleasure and pain, victory and defeat, or praise and blame. As long as what we do is right the consequences will be acceptable, either heaven or earthly enjoyment in this case. There is still some vestigial appeal here to self-interest in the references to heaven and to enjoyment, but such references eventually disappear altogether: 'He who holds equal blame and praise, . . . content with anything that comes . . . is dear to Me' (12.19).

### *2.3. Nonattachment*

If Arjuna is supposed to be 'content with anything that comes' why should he take up arms against what comes from his cousins? If he aims at a condition with 'desires stilled' (15.5), why does this not lead to quietism rather than activism? '"Action should be given up as an evil", say some learned men' (18.3). Here the dialectic returns to the negative pole—abstention from battle—and a new tension arises between Krishna's explanation and his exhortation. But for Krishna giving up attachment does not imply giving up activity: 'Not by abstention from action [*karmanam*] does a man attain freedom from action [*maiskarmyam*] . . . For no one can remain even for a moment without action [*karma*] . . . Do thy allotted activity [*karma*], for action [*karma*] is better than inaction [*akarmanah*]' (3.4–5, 3.8, cf. 18.11). The test of whether our action is allotted or deluded is whether it is the means or the end that we care about. We are unattached only if we are concerned purely with the performance of the action and not with its success; it is 'the abandonment of the fruits of all actions [*karmanam*] . . . But even these actions [*karmani*] ought to be performed, giving up attachment and desire for fruits' (18.2, 18.6).

At the previous stage *yoga* was to resolve the confusion created by different Vedic *dharmas*. Now *yoga* must resolve the tension within itself between quietism and activism, in terms of the rival conceptions of good/evil and desire/nondesire. The desires contrary to absolute *dharma* are attachments from which we are liberated by *yoga*: 'Listen now to the *Yoga*. If your intelligence accepts it, thou shalt cast away the bondage of actions . . . When one does not get attached to the objects of sense or to actions, and has renounced all purposes, the he is said to have attained to *yoga*' (2.39, 6.4). We become attached because of immediate gratification, so we must learn to think beyond the short term and realize that immediate gratification leads to long term suffering. We must become motivated not by passion (*rajas*) 'which is like

nectar at first but like poison at the end' (18.38), but by 'goodness' (*sattvikam*) 'which is like poison at first and like nectar at the end' (18–37). The problem is that we can be sure of the presence of what *rajas* aims at far more easily than we can be sure of the reality of what *sattva* aims at. Most of us lack the experiential evidence to resist the demonic belief that 'the world is unreal [*asatyam*], without a basis, without a Lord' (16.8). The objects of *rajas* are known before they are loved, but the object of *sattva* must be loved before it can be known, a far more difficult path.

### *2.4. Predestination*

If this concept of action without attachment resolves the tension between the directive that we make an effort to do our appropriate activity, including military activism, and the directive that we accept whatever comes, a new difficulty now appears at this level. On one hand, 'no one can remain even for a moment without action [*akarma*]' (3.5),[10] but on the other, 'the man whose delight is in Atman alone, . . . for him there exists no action [*karyam*] that needs to be done' (3.17). The paradox is succinctly stated in the next chapter: 'He who in action sees non-action [*karmani akarma*] and in non-action sees action [*akarmani ca karma*]—he is wise among men, he is a *yogin*, and he has accomplished all action [*karma*]' (4.18).[11] More than nonattachment is involved here. The reason no action exists for someone whose delight is in Atman alone is that it is not we who act but Atman. 'The man who is united with the Divine and knows the truth thinks, "I do [*karomiti*] nothing at all"' (5.8, cf. 3.27). There are two reasons for this. One is that divine providence (*daivam*) is a cause of all things (18.13–14): '*Karma* is the name given to the creative force that brings beings into existence' (8.3). The other is that it is through our body alone that we are the cause of or affected by anything:[12]

> But he who knows the true character of the distinction (of the soul) from the modes of nature and their actions [*gunakarma*], . . . understanding that it is the modes which are acting on the modes (themselves), does not get attached. (3.28)
>
> Having abandoned attachment to the fruit of actions [*karma*] . . . he does [*karoti*] nothing though he is ever engaged in action [*karmani*] . . . performing action [*karma*] by the body alone. (4.20–21)

In what sense is divine providence a cause of all things, in what sense is it with our body alone that we are the cause of things, and how are the two related? The answer to the first question is hardly straightforward. Krishna says, 'There is not for me, O Partha, any action [*kartavyam*] in the three worlds which has to be done . . . yet I am engaged in action [*karmani*]' (3.22); and again, 'The fourfold order was created by Me . . . Though it is my action [*kartaram*], know me to be incapable of action [*akartaram*] or change' (4.13).[13] The key here is the word 'change' (*avyayam*). Krishna once again exhorts Arjuna to attack his cousins, saying 'By Me alone are they slain already. Be thou merely the occasion' (11.33). The reason they are already slain even though Arjuna has yet to slay them is that in the creation of the world the causes of all things have already been set in motion, everything is fated. As the Isa Upanisad

puts it, Atman 'distributed objects through the eternal years' (8.4, Hume translation). Thus:

> If indulging in self-conceit, thou thinkest 'I will not fight,' vain is this, thy resolve. Nature [*prakrtis*] will compel thee. That which, though delusion, thou wishest not to do, that thou shalt do even against thy will, fettered by thy own acts born of thy nature [*svabhava-jena*] The Lord abides in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing them to turn round by His power as if they were mounted on a machine. (18.59–61)

If this is determinism it is a compatibilistic determinism. Arjuna fights only because he is finally and freely persuaded by Krishna's teachings. 'Do as thou choosest', says Krishna (18.63), and Arjuna concludes, 'Destroyed is my delusion and recognition has been gained by me through Thy grace, O Acyuta. I stand firm with my doubts dispelled. I shall act according to Thy word' (18.73).[14] Arjuna fights because he decides to, not because he is coerced to, but it was always going to happen that Arjuna would resist the fight because of his scruples, and that his charioteer would finally enlighten him to see that his scruples were misguided. With all our decisions, whatever we decide, our decision was inevitable from the beginning of time, but nevertheless the decision is ours alone to make. As with Western compatibilists like Spinoza, what is incompatible with freedom is not determinism but passion. When Arjuna asks 'by what is a man impelled to commit sin, as if by force, even against his will?', Krishna says, 'This is craving [*kama*], this is wrath [*krodha*], born of the mode of passion [*rajoguna*]' (3.36–37).

If Arjuna reached his decision 'by recognition . . . gained by me through Thy grace' (18.73), how is this compatible with freedom? If God gives Arjuna (and Samjaya: 18.75) knowledge that makes one choice obvious,[15] and withholds knowledge from Duryodhana that would have shown him the folly of his own choices, and so with all of us, then our 'free' choices can be predicted from what God (or else chance) allows us to understand and we are puppets moved by hidden strings. Thus 'The Lord abides in the hearts of all beings, O Arjuna, causing them to turn round by His power as if they were mounted on a machine' (18.61). This problem of freedom and providence has a long and vexed history in theology and has been resolved in various ways.[16] The issue brings us to the connection between the two causalities mentioned earlier, the divine causality of all things (18.13–14) and the fact that what we do is done 'by the body alone' (4.20–21).[17] As the source of time (11.32) God in himself is timeless, incapable of change (4.13) and eternally aware of the whole of time (7.26).[18] Nature not God, *prakrti* not *purusa*, is the locus of change and time: 'all action is done only by nature [*prakrtyai*] and the self [*atmanam*] is not the actor' (13.29). *Prakrti* is the moving image of *purusa*, as for Plato time is the moving image of eternity.[19] The modes following their own internal laws, like the machine referred to in 18.61, unfold the events that were timelessly present from eternity.[20] Thus despite 'causing [people] to turn round by His power as if they were mounted on a machine' (18.61), God is 'seated as if indifferent, unattached in those actions' (9.9). The latter passage describes God's timeless unchanging nature, the former describes God's nature in its temporal dimension.

We can understand the concept of grace as an image of this. It does not mean that God intervenes to give knowledge to one person but not to another. It means that as all of us arise sequentially in the temporal manifestation of the timeless divine, some of us will attain to insight and make wise choices because of the local conditions that produce our nature and circumstances, while others will not. 'Grace' is a metaphor for those who happen to be of the first kind. This is the ultimate resolution of the dialectical movement implicit in the *Bhagavadgita*. We can summarize that movement in the following table, reading from top to bottom:

| Level | Criterion | Reason not to fight | Reason to fight | Resolution |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Personal feeling | Family feeling | Their criminal greed | Family *dharma* |
| 2 | *Dharma* | Family *dharma* | Caste *dharma* | *Yoga* |
| 3 | Activity | *Yoga* stills desire | Act without desire | Nonattachment |
| 4 | Predestination | No action need be done | Body alone is active | *Prakrti* manifests *Purusa* |

What appear to be contradictions are different levels of the argument that are not identified as such.

## 3. *Yoga*

The principal *yoga*s of the *Bhagavadgita* are generally considered to be *karma*, *jñana*, and *bhakti*, but although *dhyana* is not normally accorded the same status, in the passages I discuss below it appears to be on an equal footing with the other three.[21] Indeed the whole of the Gita can be looked at as an exercise in meditation: 'O Partha, has this been heard by thee with thy thought fixed to one point?' (18.72).[22] Within the discussions of these four *yoga*s, as with the arguments discussed previously, there are contradictory statements.[23] But unlike the tensions between the grounds for fighting and grounds for not fighting, the discussion of the four *yoga*s does not even implicitly contain a dialectical hierarchy from lowest to highest. Nor are the tensions eventually resolved at an ultimate level, as were the previous ones in the conception of predestination. Nevertheless these tensions too call for some kind of resolution, although of a different kind. They revolve around the question of whether one kind of *yoga* is being recommended more highly than the others. Commentators have pointed out that *karma yoga* has a *prima facie* claim to this honor because the goal of Krishna's arguments is to spur Arjuna into action.[24] Nevertheless Krishna's words sometimes seem to point in a very different direction.

First Krishna suggests that *jñana yoga* is superior to *karma yoga*: 'Knowledge [*yajñaj, jñana*] as a sacrifice is greater than any material sacrifice . . . for all actions [*karma*] culminate in knowledge [*jñane*] . . . There is nothing on earth equal in purity to knowledge [*jñanena*]' (4.33, 4.38).[25] Thus knowledge is the goal that makes karmic sacrifice desirable, in which case knowledge is intrinsically good and karmic sacrifice appears to be only instrumentally good in the service of knowledge.

Later the superiority of *jñana yoga* appears to extend over *dhyana* and *bhakti yoga* as well:

> To those who are in constant union with me and worship me with love, I grant the power of understanding [*buddhiyogam*] by which they come unto me. Out of compassion for those same ones . . . I destroy the darkness born of ignorance by the shining lamp of knowledge [*jñana*] (10.10–11)

If 'those who are in constant union with me' is a reference to *dhyana yoga*, then Krishna is apparently saying that the reward for meditation and for worship is knowledge; knowledge is good in itself while meditation and worship are good only as means to attain it. However in Chapter 6, 'The *Yoga* of Meditation', *dhyana yoga* is said to be superior to both *jñana* and *karma yoga*: 'The [*dhyana*] *yogin* . . . is considered to be greater than the man of knowledge [*jñanibhyo*], greater than the man of ritual actions [*karmibhyas*]'.

Krishna appears to resolve at least some of the tensions by suggesting that *dhyana*, *jñana*, and *karma yoga* are equally valid paths, each in its own way, while *bhakti yoga* is inferior to them because it depends on things heard (*sruti*) rather than direct experience.[26] *Bhakti yoga* is recommended only for those who are ignorant of the other three:

> By meditation [*dhyanena*] some perceive the self in the self by the self; others by the path of knowledge [*samkhyena*] and still others by the path of actions [*karmayogena*]. Yet others, ignorant of these paths [*ajanantah*] hearing from others [*srutva*] worship; and they too cross beyond death by their devotion to what they have heard [*sruti*]. (13.24–25)

This apparent resolution too turns out to be premature, for other passages suggest that *bhakti* may be in first rather than last place. Krishna says, 'Neither by the Vedas, nor by sacrifices nor by study [*adhyayanaih*] . . . can I be seen in the world of men by any one else but thee . . . But by unswerving devotion [*bhaktya*] to me, O Arjuna, I can be thus known, truly seen and entered into' (11.48, 54). Arjuna asks him which seekers have the greater knowledge of *yoga*, 'Those devotees [*bhaktas*] who, thus ever harmonized, worship Thee, [or] those, again, who worship the Imperishable and the Unmanifested' (12.1)—in other words those who practice *bhakti yoga* or those who practice *dhyana* or *jñana yoga*. Krishna replies,

> Those who fixing their minds [*manah*] on me worship me, ever harmonized and possessed of supreme faith [*sraddhaya*]—them do I consider most perfect in *yoga* [*yuktatama*]. But those who worship the Imperishable, the Undefinable, the Unchanging and the Immobile, the Constant . . . they come to me indeed. (12.2–4)

This passage is the exact opposite of 13.24–25. Where the former seemed to say that *bhakti yoga* is the least perfect and should be employed only by those ignorant of the others, the latter says it is 'most perfect' and it is the others that are less perfect avenues to the goal.

The succeeding stanzas of Chapter 12 provide a microcosm of these tensions. First it seems that all four *yoga*s are of equal value: 'But those, who, laying all their actions [*karmani*] on me, intent on me, worship, meditating [*dhyayanta*] on me, with

unswerving devotion [*yogena*], whose intellect [*cetasam*] is set on me, I straightway deliver from the ocean of death-bound existence' (12.6–7). But this is followed by a new assertion of hierarchy. 'On Me alone fix thy mind [*mana*], let thy understanding [*buddhim*] dwell in me . . . If, however, thou art not able to fix they thought steadily on me, then seek to reach me by the practice of concentration [*abhyasa-yogena*]', i.e. meditation[27] (12.8–9). Here *dhyana* is recommended only for those unable to achieve *jñana*, while in the next stanza *bhakti* is recommended only for those unable to practice *jñana* or *dhyana*: 'If thou art unable even to seek by the practice of concentration [*abhyase*], then be as one whose supreme aim is my service; even performing actions for my sake, thou shalt attain perfection' (12.10). Last of all is *karma yoga*: 'If thou art not able to do even this, then taking refuge in my disciplined activity [*kartum*] renounce the fruit of all action [*karma*], with the self subdued' (12.11). The hierarchy descends, then, from *jñana* to *dhyana* to *bhakti* to *karma*.

In what at first appears to be a summation of the preceding stanzas Krishna says (12.12):

> [a] Better indeed is knowledge [*jñanam*] than practice [*abhyasat*]. [b] Better than knowledge [*jñanat*] is meditation [*dhyanam*]. [c] Better than meditation [*dhyanat*] is the renunciation of the fruit of action [*karma*].

Why is there no mention of *bhakti yoga*? According to the commentary by Sankara's disciple Anandagiri, '*Abhyasa* (practice)—occur[r]ing in the text and the commentary—may mean either (1) the act of listening to the teaching of the srutis with a view to obtain knowledge, or, (2) the practice of *dhyana* with a firm resolve'.[28] In the previous paragraph *abhyasat* was interpreted in the second sense, but if we take it here in the first sense, since Krishna connects *sruti* with *bhakti* (13.25[29]) it can be construed as a reference to *bhakti* 'devotional practice'. In that case all four *yoga*s would be present in this summation, and Krishna's three statements would amount to the assertions that (a) *jñana* is better than *bhakti*, (b) *dhyana* better than *jñana*, and (c) *karma* is better than *dhyana*. The resultant hierarchy—*karma*, *dhyana*, *jñana*, *bhakti*—would be consistent with the Gita's stated purpose of spurring Arjuna into action, but it flatly contradicts the verses immediately preceding, where the hierarchy was *jñana*, *dhyana*, *bhakti*, *karma*.

Suppose then we take *abhyasat* in the second sense, 'the practice of *dhyana* with a firm resolve'. That is what *abhyasa* seemed to mean in 12.9–10, and it is what is implied by Radhakrishnan's amplification of *abhyasaj* in 12.12 as 'the practice of concentration'. In that case 'a' would be saying, 'Better indeed is *jñana* than *dhyana*', which is now perfectly consistent with what we were told in 12.9. However it is directly contradicted by the very next line: 'Better than knowledge [*jñanat*] is meditation [*dhyanam*]'. However we interpret *abhyasa*, then, problems arise, either a conflict within 12.12 itself, or between 12.12 and 12.8–11.

Why is all this so confusing and even incoherent? Just before 12.8–11, where Krishna said if we cannot practice *dhyana* or *jñana* we should practice *bhakti*, and if not *bhakti* then *karma yoga*, he explained, 'The difficulty of those whose thoughts are set on the Unmanifested is greater, for the goal of the Unmanifested is hard to reach by

the embodied beings' (12.5). In other words, not everyone is capable of the concentration required by *dhyana* or the abstraction required by *jñana*, but for them there are other alternatives. We could also say, however, that not everyone is temperamentally suited for devotional worship or a life of practicing selfless service, and that the important thing is to be concerned not about hierarchies but about which path is appropriate for us individually: 'Beings follow their nature. What can repression accomplish? . . . Better is one's own law though imperfectly carried out than the law of another carried out perfectly' (3.33 and 35). Even if we think of *jñana* as the ideal to strive for, it is an imperfect ideal: 'Because of his subtlety he is unknowable [*avijñeyam*]'.[30] Ultimately all four are mutually reinforcing. Meditation (*dhyana*) gives a kind of knowledge (*jñana*) and knowledge gives something to meditate on, while both teach us to act unselfishly (*karma*) and to respect rituals (*bhakti*) as a symbol of truth. As Krishna says, 'He who, undeluded, thus knows [*janati*] Me, the Highest Person, is the knower of all and worships [*bhajati*] Me in all his being' (15.19). The different *yoga*s work on us simultaneously in different ways, *bhakti* on our emotions, *karma* on our will, *jñana* on our intellect, and *dhyana* on our spirit.[31] Again, unselfish action and pure-hearted worship both promote each other and also promote meditation and knowledge. In essence there is no difference between theory and practice: 'The ignorant speak of Samkhya and *Yoga* as different, not the wise' (5.4). In Chapter 18 all four converge. The way one 'attains to the Brahman, that supreme consummation of knowledge [*jñanasya*]' (18.50) is comprised of not only understanding (*buddhya*, 18.51), but also meditation (*dhyanayogopara*, 18.52), devotion (*madbhaktim*, 18.54), and selfless action (*sarvakarmany*, 18.56–57).[32]

If each path of *yoga* is equally valid in its own way and leads to the same goal, why not simply say so instead of proclaiming mutually exclusive hierarchies?[33] Perhaps in recognition of the inexperience of its audience the *Gita* speaks to us at our own individual level. The more deeply we go into *yoga* the more we realize that the paths converge and are mutually reinforcing, but at the beginning the tendency is for people to want simple answers rather than qualified and complicated ones. Plato and Aristotle distinguish between what is most clear to us and what is most clear by nature. In this case what is most clear to us—before we have begun to rid ourselves of delusion—is that these four paths are obviously very different. *To us*, at this stage, one is always superior, and to tell us that we reach the same place by participating in the group ceremonies in devotion to a personal deity, and by sitting silently in solitary meditation of an impersonal oneness, is incomprehensible at first. By telling us that our own particular path is the best of all, Krishna protects us from feeling overwhelmed by the different choices available, and from feeling confused by claims that such apparently incompatible ways of life are essentially the same. If we recognize our path as the most highly praised in one of Krishna's formulations we will be more inclined to pursue it with full confidence (and can easily ignore the other passages). Each of the four *yoga*s is presented in one passage or other from its own point of view, from which the other three look to be inferior. This ultimate dialectic is the same as the tension within religious tolerance, which stands ambiguously between dogmatism and inclusiveness. Whereas inclusiveness means

accepting that different religions may be equally valid alternative expressions of truth, tolerance, as I am using it here, means tolerating views that you think are misguided—unlike dogmatists who want to root out whatever they perceive as error.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato's Socrates helps us understand why the historical Socrates left no writings. He tells Phaedrus that for our rhetoric to be effective we must know what type of person responds to what type of speech, and we must be able to identify to which type the person we are speaking to belongs, and we also must be sensitive to the circumstances of the moment since we cannot say exactly the same words to the same person under all circumstances and at all times with equal effectiveness. There are numerous examples of this kind of selectivity in the dialogs since they are representations of imagined conversations.[34] A nonfictional example can be found in Confucius' *Analects* (1979, 11.22).

> Zu-lu asked, 'Should one immediately put into practice what one has heard?'. The Master said, 'As your father and elder brothers are still alive, you are hardly in a position immediately to put into practice what you have heard'.
>
> Jan Yu asked, 'Should one immediately put into practice what one has heard?'. The Master said, 'Yes. One should'.
>
> Kung-hsi Hua said, 'When Yu asked whether one should immediately put into practice what one had heard, you pointed out that his father and elder brothers were alive. Yet when Ch'iu asked whether one should immediately put into practice what one had heard, you answered that one should. I am puzzled. May I be enlightened?'.
>
> The Master said, 'Ch'iu holds himself back. It is for this reason that I tried to urge him on. Yu has the energy of two men. It is for this reason that I tried to hold him back'.

Here Confucius does not simply advocate pursuing the golden mean, as he does elsewhere,[35] because someone who is not yet centered cannot recognize the mean. To one such person it may be necessary to recommend a course of action different from the course recommended to someone else. The author of the *Bhagavadgita* may be employing a similar strategy. Krishna's words are addressed in the first instance to Arjuna, but in the second instance to other auditors like Samjaya (18.74), then at one remove to Samjaya's immediate audience (1.2) and to the audience of the *Bhagavadgita*.

In addition to suggesting that all four approaches are equally true, although from different points of view, the paradoxes that result from juxtaposing these incompatible recommendations also reflect that the fact that all are equally false. God is indefinable (*anirdesyam*), unmanifest (*avyaktam*), and unthinkable (*acintyam*) (12.3), so no path can do full justice to what it aims at. The impossibility of reconciling the paradoxes may lead us to recognize the impossibility of any account that is not paradoxical. It prevents us from resting in the words and forces us to look beyond them.

## 4. Nonviolence

Does a dialectical reading resolve the apparent contradiction within the question of whether all things are identical with God, even ungodly ones like violence?

Edgerton writes:

> Since *all* comes from God, it seems impossible to deny that origin to anything.[36] In another passage, God is declared the course of all 'psychic' states and experiences, *good and bad alike*, tho [*sic*] the good predominate in the list.[37] More definite recognition of the origin even of evil in God is found in (10.36 and 38).[38] If even in these passages we seem to find a tendency to slur over the evil of the world and its necessary relation to a quasi-pantheistic God, in other places the Gita feels it necessary to qualify its semipantheism by definitely ruling out evil from God's nature. Thus to a passage in the seventh chapter which is strongly suggestive of pantheism . . . —'I am the taste in water, etc.; I am the intelligence of the intelligent, the majesty of the majestic'—there is added this significant verse (7.11): 'I am the strength of the strong, *free from lust and passion*; I am desire in (all) beings (but) *not* (such desire as is) *opposed to righteousness*'. Thus the Gita strengthens its appeal to the natural man, or to 'common sense', at the expense of logic and consistency. (1968, 147–148, italics in original)

Are logic and consistency dispensed with here or can these contradictions be resolved by distinguishing different levels of the argument?

That there are contradictory statements is undeniable. Throughout the Gita Krishna regularly tells Arjuna what he ought to do and what he ought not to do. Even the pivotal verse 2.38 concludes by saying, 'Thus shalt thou not incur sin'. How then can he soon afterwards tell Arjuna to cast aside the distinction between good and evil (2.50) or wish and hate (8.27)? On the contrary, the message seems to be that we ought to hate sin as evil, and wish to do good in accordance with *dharma*. Krishna even uses the promise of approval to motivate Arjuna not to care about approval: 'He who holds equal blame and praise . . . is dear to Me' (12.19). To urge Arjuna to renounce dualities already implies a distinction between the good wished-for renunciation of duality, and the evil hateful demonic making of dualities. Krishna is evidently aware of the tension since he says in the same verse both that he is devoid of desire and that he is a desire: 'I am the strength of the strong, devoid of desire [*kama*] and passion [*raga*]. In beings am I the desire [*kama*] which is not contrary to law [*dharma*]' (7.11).

Rather than resulting from a sacrifice of logic and consistency, I think that here, as with the inconsistent ranking of the different *yoga*s, the tension pushes us to a deeper level of understanding. It pushes us to distinguish two senses of good and evil, and two senses of desire, one of which is relative to our individual pleasures and pains and is prohibited by *dharma*, while the other is absolute and is required by dharma.[39] The tension is resolved by moving from the human perspective of relative dualities to the divine perspective of an absolute duality between enlightenment and delusion. Insofar as everything that happens follows from the nature of the divine, in accordance with the determinism discussed earlier, then everything that happens is in accordance with goodness and is good. But there are two ways that an action can be good. An action done in accordance with an enlightened state of mind, without attachment and with its fruits relinquished, is good both intrinsically and instrumentally, good in itself and good because it is part of divine predestination, i.e. the goodness of the whole. However an action done for *rajasic* or *tamasic* reasons, done because of an attachment to its fruits, is not good in itself but only instrumentally, as an intrinsic element in the

overall good. Duryodhana's actions are part of the divine design, and so far good, but in themselves evil because their goal is to achieve a personal advantage rather than to manifest *dharma*. The desire to manifest *dharma*, to do what is impersonally right, is 'the desire which is not contrary to *dharma*', as opposed to the combination of 'desire [*kama*] and passion [*raga*]', i.e. attached desire. The Katha Upanisad says (4.10, Hume translation): 'Whatever is here, that is there. What is there, that again is here. He obtains death after death Who seems to see a difference here'. Actions that are good only instrumentally and not intrinsically follow from the belief in a difference, a belief that our self is that by which we differ from all others rather than that which we have in common with all others. By contrast, those actions are good intrinsically that follow from a belief that 'Whatever is here, that is there. What is there, that again is here'. It is the golden rule taken to its ultimate justification: there is no ultimate difference between myself and others.

It is in this same spirit that Krishna can urge Arjuna to fight while at the same time praising nonviolence. Although he tells Arjuna to reject dualistic thinking, and not to distinguish between pleasure and pain, birth and death, fear and fearlessness, fame and infamy, Krishna embraces dualism when he praises nonviolence but not its complement, violence.[40] The difference is that in the first group of dualities both sides are characterized by attachment and difference, whereas in the latter pair only violence is attached and nonviolence unattached. Precisely because Arjuna does not want to fight, his fighting would not be an act of violence, i.e. attached. To act from *dharma* rather than desire exempts the action from being violent. Acts of violence have often been committed in the name of duty, but what Krishna means by duty is very specific. Not only must we 'expect no reward and believe firmly that it is [our] duty to offer the sacrifice' (17.11), but we must make sure we are free of 'the dualities which arise from wish and hate' (8.27). As with Kant, we can most be sure we are acting from duty when our course of action does not coincide with our self-interest.[41] We must be 'able to resist the rush of desire and anger' (5.23) and be impartial (*samabuddhir*) among those we love and those we hate (6.9). Krishna does not simply urge Arjuna to fight, but to 'fight, delivered from thy fever' (3.30). What Arjuna must do, what any of us must do if we want to be certain of acting from duty rather than inclination, is to make sure that our decision is made in a state of tranquility (*prasadah*, 17.16), free from wish and hate, desire and anger, and favoritism of any kind. The presence of any of these emotions undermines our sense of duty, and it is unlikely that violent acts performed in the name of duty are free of such influences.

In saying that pleasure and pain both proceed from the divine, but not both nonviolence and violence (10.4–5), Krishna distances himself from the ordinary understanding of violence as inflicting pain. Not the fruit of the action but the source of the action is what determines whether it is intrinsically good and free from violence (every action is instrumentally good as contributing to the predestined course of events). What Laozi (ch. 5) expresses starkly—

Heaven and Earth are not humane.
They treat all things as straw dogs.

The sage is not humane.
He regards all people as straw dogs. [Chan trans.]

—Krishna puts more discursively: 'Wise men do not grieve for the dead or for the living . . . Just as a person casts off worn-out garments and puts on others that are new, even so does the embodied soul cast off worn-out bodies and take on others that are new' (2.11 and 22). For Krishna as for Laozi, individuality is inessential. Reality lies only in the undifferentiated and eternal.

From an analytic point of view Edgerton is right to say that some of Krishna's teachings are 'at the expense of logic and consistency'. No linguistic distinction alone can justify the statement that to be divine is to be free of desire and yet also to manifest the ultimate desire, or that we must 'cast away both good and evil' in order to pursue the good and escape evil, or that it is permissible to go to war and kill people as long as we do not do so violently. Until the paradox or its equivalent pushes us to conceive a perspective that we were blind to when the contradiction brought us to a halt, merely verbal distinctions will seem arbitrary. The paradox is dialectical because it can be resolved only when we are able *see* a difference that we were not able to see before.



## Notes

[1] 1. The depression of Arjuna.
2. The *yoga* of theory (*samkhyayogo*).
3. The *yoga* of actions (*karmayogo*).
4. The *yoga* of knowledge (*jñanayogo*).
5. The *yoga* of renunciation of action (*karmasamnyasayogo*).
6. The *yoga* of meditation (*dhyanayogo*).
7. The *yoga* of knowledge and wisdom (*jñanavijñanayogo*).
8. The *yoga* of the imperishable absolute (*aksarabrahmayogo*).
9. The *yoga* of sovereign knowledge and sovereign mystery (*rajavidyarajaguhyayogo*).
10. The *yoga* of manifestation (*vibhutiyogo*).
11. The vision of the cosmic form.
12. The *yoga* of devotion (*bhaktiyogo*).
13. The *yoga* of the distinction between the field and the knower (*ksetraksetrajñanavibhagayogo*).
14. The *yoga* of the differentiation of the three modes (*gunatrayavibhagayogo*).
15. The *yoga* of the supreme person (*purusottamayogo*).
16. The *yoga* of the distinction between the divine and the demoniac endowments (*daivasurasampadvibhagayogo*).
17. The *yoga* of the threefold division of faith (*sraddhatrayavibhagayogo*).
18. The *yoga* of release by renunciation (*moksasamnyasayogo*).

[2] Cf. Sharma (1986, xii–xvi).

[3] Cf. Radhakrishnan (1948, p. 28): 'The boundless universe in an endless space and time rests in Him and not He in it'.

[4] Unless otherwise specified all translations (with occasional modifications) are from Radhakrishnan (1948). For an exploration of Krishna's injunction here, see Sartwell (1993). Cf. Marcus Aurelius 6.50: our will is to make an effort; success is out of our hands.

[5] 'One who sets fires, gives poison, attacks with weapon in hand, plunders the property, dispossesses of the territory as well as of women – these six are *atatayinah*' (*Vasisthasmrti* III.16). Cited in Upadhyaya (1969, pp. 159–169, p. 164). Upadhyaya points out that the Kauravas 'committed not one but all the six heinous crimes' (1969, pp. 159–169, p. 164).

[6] Krishna first chides Arjuna for a faintheartedness that will lead to his disgrace, an argument which does nothing to shake Arjuna's scruples about killing members of his clan (2.2–9). Next Krishna argues that since the true self cannot be killed Arjuna's scruples are irrelevant (2.11–30), but this does nothing to dispel Arjuna's worries about destroying the family *dharma*.

[7] 'Heroism, vigor, steadiness, resourcefulness, not fleeing even in a battle, generosity and leadership, these are the action [*karma*] of a Kshatriya born of his nature' (18.43).

[8] The *Gita* is often critical of the Vedas:

> The undiscerning who rejoice in the letter of the Veda, who contend that there is nothing else, whose nature is desire and who are intent on heaven, proclaim these flowery words that result in rebirth as the fruit of actions and (lay down) various specialized rites for the attainment of enjoyment and power. The intelligence which is to be trained, of those who are devoted to enjoyment and power and whose minds are carried away by these words (of the Veda) is not well-established in the Self. (2.42–44)
>
> [T]he seeker after the knowledge of *yoga* goes beyond the Vedic rule. (6.44)
>
> They speak of the imperishable peepal tree as having its root above and branches below. Its leaves are the Vedas and he who knows this is the knower of the Vedas. Its branches extend below and above, nourished by the modes, with sense objects for its twigs; and below, in the world of men, stretch forth the roots resulting in actions. Its real form is not thus perceived here, nor its end nor beginning nor its foundation . . . [C]ut off this firm-rooted peepal tree with the strong sword of non-attachment. (15.1–3)

The comparison of the Vedas to the leaves suggests that the Vedas are the most remote and extrinsic expressions of truth, dependent on sense objects (the twigs), although Sankara (1991) interprets the metaphor more favorably to the Vedas ('As leaves serve as protectors of a tree, so the Vedas serve as the protectors of the world' (p. 593; cf. Radhakrishnan, 1957, 150n). This is not to deny that the Vedas have an important function. When Krishna says, 'As is the use of a pond in a place flooded with water everywhere, so is that of all the Vedas for the Brahmin who understands', (2.46), the implication is that although the Vedas are superfluous for those who can achieve an inner apprehension of the truth, they are important for those whose inner resources are more limited. Also see 17.1–5, 17.14–19.

[9] In the text Radhakrishnan translates this as 'not brought about in regular causal sequence', but in his notes he leaves out the word 'causal'.

[10] Sankara removes the paradox by taking Krishna to be referring only to the unenlightened (on 3.5).

[11] On Sankara's interpretation it is only the unenlightened who perceive *karma* in a*karma*—the way to someone on a moving boat the motionless trees appear to be moving—while the enlightened perceive a*karma* in *karma* because they recognize that *karma* is only a superimposition on a*karma* (on 4.18).

[12] 'And yet, inconsistently as it seems at first sight, the soul is spoken of as experiencing pleasure and pain, which result from material contacts and processes . . . The key to the seeming inconsistency . . . [is that] it is only because the soul is associated with matter that it . . . *seems* to "enjoy" material processes . . . due to the confusion caused by the organ of self-consciousness, the "I-faculty", which is a product of material nature and really quite

disconnected with the soul' (Edgerton, 1964, p. 143; cf. p. 141 for the role of the I-faculty, *ahamkara*).

[13] Radhakrishnan's translation is, 'Though I am its creator, know me to be incapable of action or change', which I modified to bring out the opposition between *kartaram* and *akartaram*, as does Radhakrishnan himself when he paraphrases the passage as 'He is the doer of works who yet is not the doer, *kartaram*, *akartaram*' (1948, p. 72).

[14] Sharma writes, quoting Raynor Johnson, 'There is no fate, circumstance or even[t] which in the last analysis we do not or have not created for ourselves' (1979, pp. 531–537; 36). On Fingarette's view, 'the *Gita* by-passes, and in an important sense undercuts, the traditional Western preoccupation with free will and determinism' (1984, pp. 357–369). Sellmann argues in quasi-Kantian terms that although from an empirical point of view the Gita's determinism cannot be refuted there is an absolute ineffable sense of freedom that exists together with it (1987, pp. 375–388). For a recent discussion see Stansell (2008, pp. 76–78).

[15] The clearest example of knowledge bestowed by grace is in Chapter 11: 'But thou canst not behold Me with this (human) eye of yours; I will bestow on thee the supernatural eye' (11.8). And later, 'By My grace, through My divine power, O Arjuna, was shown to thee this supreme form' (11.47). Cf. 18.56, 18.58, 18.62.

[16] Cf. Radhakrishnan (1948, pp. 375–376).

[17] This is a simplification of the five factors mentioned by Krishna: 'The seat of action and likewise the agent, the instruments of various sorts, the many kinds of efforts and [divine] providence being the fifth' (18.14). For discussion of this passage, including the implications for human freedom and responsibility, see MacKenzie (2001).

[18] 'The boundless universe in an endless space and time rests in Him and not He in it' (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 28). 'God has control over time because He is outside of it' (Radhakrishnan, 1948, p. 280).

[19] *Timaeus* 37 d. Cf. Radhakrishnan (1948): 'Time derives from eternity and finds fulfillment in it' (p. 38).

[20] For a subtle phenomenological exploration of how this appears within our consciousness see Teschner (1992, pp. 65–68, 76–77). Teschner also argues that 'It is particularly difficult for Western philosophy to understand the importance and centrality of action in the interpretation of Asian thought . . . [because] for Indian philosophy of mind, thought is a species of action and behaviour . . . However, for Western philosophy, the causality of thought and action are different. A reason for this is to be found in the concept of mind which Western thinkers have inherited from the G[r]eek and Christian traditions' (pp. 74–75). But Krishna has to convince Arjuna that *prakrti*, and not Arjuna's intentions, is the agency of events, which suggests that Arjuna's attitude, and that of his culture, is not very different from ours.

[21] Chapter 3 recognizes only two *yoga*s: 'a twofold way of life has been taught of yore by Me, the path of knowledge [*jñanayogena*] for men of contemplation [*samkhyanam*] and that of actions [*karmayogena*] for men of action [*yoginam*]' (3.3). *Bhakti* does not appear as an additional path until Chapter 9. In between Krishna says, 'Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind and understanding and self-sense—this is the eightfold division of my nature [*prakrtir*]. This is My lower nature. Know My other and higher nature which is the soul [*jiva*], by which this world is upheld' (7.4 and 7.5). Although the terminology differs, the distinction between Krishna's lower and higher nature appears to anticipate the subsequent distinction in Chapter 13 between *prakriti* and *purusa*. If *dhyana* can be considered a fourth principal *yoga* here, it is possible that the transition from two *yoga*s to four is because the distinction between *prakriti* and *purusa* cuts across that between contemplation (*samkhya*) and action (*yoga*): action focused on *prakrti* is *karma yoga*, and focused on *purusa* is *bhakti yoga*; while contemplation focused on *prakrti* is *jñana yoga*, and focused on *purusa* is *dhyana yoga*. In any case, nothing in my overall reading turns on the relative status of *dhyana*.

[22] Radhakrishnan writes, 'We must divest our minds of all sensual desires, abstract our attention from all external objects and absorb it in the object of meditation. See B.G., XVIII, 72, where the teacher asks Arjuna whether he heard his teaching with his mind fixed to one point' (1948, p. 193). Radhakrishnan even titles Chapter 6 of the Gita, which is devoted to meditation, 'The True *Yoga*'.

[23] For further details about the contradictions and their recepion see Sharma (1986, xxiii–xxx).

[24] E.g. Hiriyanna (1993, p. 118). Shankara, on the other hand, is at pains to reject this conclusion.

[25] Sankara refers to a similar sentiment at 3.1—'If thou deemest that (the path of) understanding [*buddhir*] is more excellent than (the path of) action [*karmanas*]'—as evidence that the path of understanding takes absolute precedence over the path of action (Sankara following 2.10, 3.1 and *passim*). But other passages show the issue to be less straightforward, as we shall see. Radhakrishnan translates *jñane* and *jñanena* here as 'wisdom'. Throughout, he translates forms of *jñana* either as 'knowledge' or 'wisdom' depending on context. I substitute 'knowledge' for 'wisdom' here and elsewhere in order to emphasize with terminological consistency where *jñana yoga* is implied.

[26] Cf. 2.52: 'When thy intelligence shall cross the whirl of delusion, then shalt thou become indifferent to what has been heard and what is yet to be heard [*srotavyasya srutasya*]'.

[27] Thus Sankara: 'Practice [*abhyasa*] consists in repeatedly fixing the mind on a single object by withdrawing it from everything else' (on 12.9; 1991, p. 481). In the next quotation (12.10) Radhakrishnan translates *abhyase* by 'practice' instead of 'the practice of concentration' as here. I expand it to the previous rendering to emphasize that the same term is being used.

[28] Cited in Sankara (1977, 309n'∗').

[29] 'Yet others, ignorant of this, hearing [*srutva*] from others, worship; they too cross beyond death by their devotion to what they have heard [*sruti*]'. Cf. Gambhirananda: '*Practice* [*abhyasat*]—repeated effort to ascertain the true meaning of Vedic texts, in order to acquire knowledge' (in Sankara, 1991, 483n3).

[30] 13.15. Radhakrishnan translates, 'He is too subtle to be known'. Cf. 7.26: 'Me no one knows [*veda*]'. As an avatar of God, Krishna refers to God sometimes in the third and sometimes in the first person.

[31] Cf. Sharma (1960, 33–37). Sharma concludes, however, that *jñana* is the most important and that *karma* and *bhakti* 'are only manifestations of *jñana*' (p. 37). In accordance with the usual practice, he is concerned only with *bhakti*, *karma*, and *jñana yoga*s, and not with *dhyana*.

[32] Cf. Rauf Mazari: 'Love is a way to truth, to knowledge, to action. But only those who know of real love can approach these things by means of love. The others have misunderstood certain other feelings for those of real love . . . Truth is a way to love, knowledge, to action. But only those who can follow real truth can follow its path as a way . . . What [others] call truth is something less. Knowledge is a way to action, to love, to truth. But since it is not the kind of knowledge that people hold it to be, they do not benefit from it. It is everywhere, but they cannot see it, and call out for it while it is beside them all the time. Action, too, is a way. It is a way to love, to truth, to knowledge. But . . . [people] will generally be so immersed in action of another kind that [they] will not be able to perform the right action which [they] need'. Quoted in Shah (1974, p. 285).

[33] Sharma suggests that these contradictory passages can be seen as differences in emphasis, and that Krishna's point is that 'Arjuna should fight no matter from which angle the issue was viewed – whether of *Jñana*, *Bhakti* or *Karma*' (1986, xxiii, xxvi). Also see Minor (1980, pp. 446–451).

[34] Cf. the difference between the *Apology* and *Crito*. In his trial, Socrates tells his legalistic jurors that he could not obey a law he thought unjust. But in jail he defends something like the opposite point of view to Crito because Crito is too ready to subvert the law.

[35] Confucius calls it supreme as a moral virtue (6.29, cf. 7.38, 11.16, 13.21).

[36] Edgerton cites 7.12: 'Whatever states of being there are, be they of the nature of goodness, passion, or darkness, . . . know that all of them come from Me alone'. The translations in these passages are Edgerton's, as are the italics and parenthetic insertions within them. Since I do not elide these quotations but only move them from Edgerton's text to the notes in order to focus on Edgerton's own words, I do not replace them with ellipsis marks in the text.

[37] Edgerton cites 10.4–5: 'Enlightenment, knowledge, freedom from delusion, patience, truth, self-control, peace, pleasure, *pain*, coming-into-being, passing away, *fear*, and fearlessness too; harmlessness, indifference (equanimity), content, austerity, generosity, fame, and *disrepute* – the states of creatures, of all various sorts, come from Me alone'. Edgerton regularly elides silent letters from 'though' and 'although'.

[38] 'I am the gambling of rogues, the majesty of the majestic; I am conquest, I am adventure (of conquerors and adventurers); I am the courage of the courageous . . . I am the violence of conquerors, I am the statecraft of ambitious princes; I too am the taciturnity of things that are secret, I am the knowledge of the learned'.

[39] Thus too in the Bible's book of *Genesis* we are prohibited from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but at the same time required to know and to do the good commanded by God and avoid the evil forbidden by God (Genesis 2.17). The tree of the knowledge of good and evil makes us sinful because it makes us be like God (3.5). What pleases and displeases God is good and evil absolutely, but for us to equate our own pleasure and displeasure with goodness and evil is to become self-willed and sinful.

[40] '. . . [S]elf-control and calmness; pleasure and pain, existence and non-existence, fear and fearlessness. Non-violence, equal-mindedness, . . . fame and ill-fame, the different states of being proceed from me alone' (10.4–5). Cf. 13.7, 16.2, 17.14.

[41] But Krishna would not go as far as Kant in saying that an action in accord with duty should be independent of our inclination. For the virtue ethics of the Gita, unlike Kant's deontology, it is necessary to bring our inclinations as well as our decisions into agreement with the good rather than with self-interest.

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